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The quotations and running commentary we have made will, we hope, give our readers some idea of the scope of Mr. Taylor's remarkably stimulating book. A full criticism of it and comparison with similar works — especially in the field of morals with Lecky's well-known treatise — is impossible at this time, but we trust that we may be able to accomplish it at some not distant period. R.

A HISTORY OF MODERN FRENCH LITERATURE.¹

Dr. Wells's book is in title and *format* a companion volume to his *Modern German Literature* reviewed by us about eighteen months ago, but in content it is a decidedly more ambitious and important piece of work. This is partly due to the greater complexity of his task, partly to a natural advance in critical methods. To a larger field he has brought more matured powers, and the result is a book which is at once the best thing we have of its kind and a credit to American scholarship.

It at once suggests comparison with a work of Professor Saintsbury's — not the latter's *Short History of French Literature* but his recent attempt to compress into one volume the whole range of nineteenth century English literature. This is practically, though not entirely, what Dr. Wells has tried to do for French literature. The first three chapters which cover the "Middle Age and Renaissance" and the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are really but a sort of *prolegomena* to the ten chapters that deal with the literature of the present age. Hence one is fully warranted in comparing the work of the Edinburgh with that of our own Sewanee professor. The comparison is in our opinion (which may of course be biassed) not at all unfavorable to Dr. Wells. He may not indeed be quite as widely read in his subject as Professor Saintsbury is in his — at least he does not so frequently obtrude his reading, — but he

¹ *Modern French Literature.* By Benjamin W. Wells, Ph.D. (Harv.) Boston, Roberts Brothers, 1896.

surely possesses what the English critic as surely lacks — a sense of balance and proportion and a grasp upon the principles of rational criticism. We do not, indeed, agree with everything that Dr. Wells writes, but we never find ourselves obliged to differ from him as widely as we are constantly obliged to differ from Professor Saintsbury through the latter's inveterate propensity to substitute the freakishness of his individual taste for the ordered judgments of the body of critics. Dr. Wells, for example, seems to us to do less than justice to Balzac and perhaps to Lamartine, but it is impossible for him to write as flippantly and ignorantly of any great writer as Professor Saintsbury allows himself to do about Lord Byron. In other words Dr. Wells has had the judgment to prepare himself for his work by mastering the sound principles of French criticism before attempting to write about French literature and it is needless to add that he has profited most from his study of M. Brunetière. This is but to say that Dr. Wells has consulted the real interests of his readers in giving them a sane and lucid treatise upon his important theme instead of consulting his own whims and crotchets and producing a collection of his own impressions about French literature. Such ordered criticism is rare both in England and America and Dr. Wells has really done a good deed in showing us that it is perfectly possible to develop it in our midst.

We have now indicated what seems to us to be the most valuable feature of this book. It remains only to praise a few special features and to commend it to our readers as the most excellent first-hand survey we have of what is in many respects the most important of modern literatures. We are particularly pleased with Dr. Wells's balanced treatment of that great though often erratic genius, Zola, and we are in perfect accord with his sympathetic criticism of that true poet, Leconte de Lisle. Baudelaire's sinister genius seems to us to be admirably delineated, and if Victor Hugo receives more than his proper share of space our author certainly errs in good company. But better than his treatment of in-

dividual writers is Dr. Wells's success in tracing the evolution of the various *genres*, and it is mainly this feature — a rare one in any history of literature — which lifts his volume from the rank of a mere hand-book into that of a sustained and worthy treatise upon a great subject.

CRAIK'S ENGLISH PROSE.¹

This valuable contribution to the systematic study of our literature is very similar in plan, equal in execution, and hardly inferior in interest, to Ward's *English Poets* issued by the same publishers. Its declared purpose is to show the growth and development of English Prose, by extracts from the principal and most characteristic writers. It proposes in introductory notices to give only so much biographical detail as will enable the reader to judge the general circumstances of the author's environment and the scope of his work. This it relegates to small type and places between brackets, and then proceeds with more generous typography to discuss the writer's style and methods and his place in the development of English Prose.

Such a work is perhaps even more valuable for the study of the English language than of English literature. The *disjecta membra* of an author or of a fossil may afford a very fair idea of outward structure but they can give very little hint of the inner nature. And therefore it is natural and right that throughout this book stress should be laid on form and diction rather than on the import, ethical, intellectual, or æsthetic, of the author, or on the debit and credit of his literary influence. These matters are not neglected, but it is not unfair to say that they are subordinated.

The five volumes correspond to five periods, the first embracing the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries from which fifty-one writers are selected for comment which is committed to sixteen more or less distinguished specialists.

¹ *English Prose*, Selections with critical introductions by various writers and general introductions to each period. Edited by Henry Craik. New York and London: Macmillan & Co. Five volumes.